



A Highlight of Henry Venn's Innovation in Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Poverty Eradication Programme in Nigeria

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Abstract. The processes of impoverishment that mainly underpin poverty are underscored in many critical aspects of deprivation engendered by lack of access to resources for dignified livelihoods (natural, material and financial), health burden precipitated by inadequate access to good health facilities; poor housing and lack of basic services i.e., the basic necessities of life and powerlessness to mention few. More often than not, the aforementioned impinged extensively on the poor because they limit people's access to income-earning opportunities, basic necessities of life, and resources which ultimately undermined the fulfilment of their civil, socio-political, and economic and resource-use rights. Unfortunately, it is an attempt to forestall this encroachment that Henry Venn, the British Missionary Church co-founder in his "Instruction to Missionaries" presents certain principles that will enhance economic viability and financial independence. This endeavour is a far-reaching Church-based entrepreneurial innovation that is embedded with the potential of curtailing poverty and emancipate the impoverished and the society at large for social and global sustainable development. To this extent, we shall do a rapprochement into Venn's concept of Church-based entrepreneurship programme in the light of its viability for a sustainable global development. We engaged the tool of historical and analytical method in data analysis. We conclude that, Church-based entrepreneurial enterprise is a viable engagement; and with illustrations from some selected churches on their entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria, it is obvious that Henry Venn's 18th century innovation is classic and pivotal to sustainable global development in the 21st century.

Keywords: Christianity, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development, Innovation, Poverty Eradication

1. Introduction

In the words of Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, speaking on Johannesburg Summit in the year 2002, said that, "... the quest to build a more sustainable future... send out a message that sustainable development is not a necessity, but also an exceptional opportunity to place our economies and societies on a more durable footing." This statement cannot be truer for the continent of Africa in recent times than when this pronouncement was made. There is no gainsaying that the poverty level of most African countries is very high. This has made it impossible for Africans to meet up with the basic necessities of life including food, shelter, good environment, primary healthcare etc. In this conjecture, one might begin to be curious in asking how the world and Africa in particular can get rid of poverty. Without mincing words, solutions to the world's endemic and pinching poverty phenomenon demands multi-dimensional approach. Hence, in ridding the world of poverty, towards sustainable development for sustainable livelihood, from the Christian perspectives entails an historical search into the efforts made in the past to bring about self-reliance.

1.1 Conceptual Underpinnings

The need to rejuvenate the quest to build a society with equal opportunity for all and the achievement of sustainable development and livelihood came on board with the launching of a 15 years developmental programme agenda by the United Nations that was widely known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are eight goals synthesized from previous development goals to be achieved by 2015 that responds to the world's main development challenges. It was officially established at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000 and was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state. The goals may be said not to be wholly new but were articulated from the goals of the previous

millennium that must be tackled headlong at the beginning of the new millennium that started in year 2000. In the course of time, the MDGs constituted the nerve centre and focus of global development agenda. One or more targets have been set for each of the eight goals and all major international and regional organization are collaborating with a view to making the goals, with their respective targets, achievable. With 1990 as a benchmark, indicators have been formulated to measure the progress made against all targets as each country is expected to adjust each goal, with its targets and indicators, based on the peculiarity of its own situation. The need to review the success or successes of this millennium agenda apparently led to the launching of another development goals tagged 'Sustainable Development Goals' SDGs. The issue of Poverty, hunger, health conditions, education and the climate continue to be pressing global challenges. As a result, the new agenda, the 17 SDGs can be grouped into six "essential elements": dignity, people, planet, prosperity, justice and partnership. The new agenda is driven by International Development works which saw between 1990 and 2015, the number of those living in extreme poverty fallen from an estimated 1.9 billion to 836 million. This success in development works points to the fact that, institutions; government, NGOs, and faith-based corporations can play an important role by leading change and innovation, using business practices in developing regions to spur sustainable economic growth, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, championing peace and gender equality, and providing much-needed financial support. This is the nexus in which the pivotal role of the church is germane. The role of the church in human development is essential and is not just a new concept. The more reason why it is needful to re-focus the agenda of the church and bring to the fore the innovation made in time past to achieve financial empowerment and self-reliance.

idea behind the concept of development is described as "the act, process or result of developing or state of being developed, gradual advance or growth through progressive changes. Achieving sustainable development growth would connote, then, the act, process or result of developing sustainable growth or state of sustained growth. From this assertion, Gerhard Sauter mentions two concept that are central to the idea of development. Firstly, is the sense of an "organisation by creation." This means a development towards a higher and better process. Another concept of development is that of the mind leading to a complete mastery over nature in which case the humanity of man is no longer subjugated to nature. Sauter describes this as one of the sources of the technical development of western civilization, the idea

of freedom, and the conception that man must progressively understand the whole world in itself in order to be able to develop from it an environment which is suitable for him. Mala noted however, that, this understanding of development in the western world entails strong economic, technical, scientific and technological connotations. To this end, if development is understood to mean an enhancement of human knowledge and productivity, then, development can be viewed in another sense as the process of improvement in basic human needs, jobs, incomes, food, homes, health, participation in decision making, to mention few.

In context therefore, from an economic angle, development is about human satisfaction as well as social context of growth. Hence, it can be conceived at both the individual and the social levels. At the individual level, it equates, according to Rodney, increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Thus, Rodney defines development at the societal level as an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Thus, from a socially grounded and materially-sensitive conceptualisation, development, as An-Na'im portrays it, is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other "essential services", all with a view to improving the individual and collective "quality of life". In essence, "true" sustainable development growth agenda viz-a-viz social development in the view of Adelman, not only reflects "the degree of social, political and spiritual satisfaction in the society", but also "the extent of progress in fulfilling societal material needs". Against this background, the issue of sustainable development growth can be fixed. The idea behind The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda are an aggressive, but achievable group of objectives that, if attained, will make the world a much better place. The 17 goals seek to end poverty, ensure food security, make access to healthcare universal, protect the environment, and much more. At the end of the 2015 the UN General Assembly formally accepted a new set of 17 measurable Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ranging from ending world poverty to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls by 2030. These goals succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight measurable goals which were signed in September 2000. And just as it was in the MDGs, so do we have it in the SDGs that is to achieve total eradication of poverty in the world.

However, before leaving this section, a brief critical analysis of the role of the church in financial empowerment of the poor, and poverty eradication will be in order. The conceptual framework of A.O Dada is adopted here. He examines the role of the Church, at both the 'conceptual' and 'paraxial' level. In his discussion of the roles of Nigerians churches in poverty alleviation, he noted that, at the conceptual level, Nigerian churches have contributed to the conceptualization of the issue of poverty alleviation, and have raised people's consciousness about this canker. The Church has done this by using motivational teaching with the hope of re-orienting the mentality of individuals. This is done in order to enhance productivity, efficiency and wealth. At the paraxial level, churches in Nigeria have established people-oriented programmes to alleviate poverty, like empowering people in business skills, seminars on financial independence, and of course continuous prayers to fight against the forces of poverty. By this, poverty eradication is conceptualized within spiritual and physical realm. And this is an initiation that the church in Nigeria has continued to pursue.

Notwithstanding, it should be noted that some churches still believe that the role of the church is not to fight poverty, that should be left for the government to pursue. Rather the church's main role is salvific and to present the church to Christ without spot or wrinkle. This assertion is totally incongruence to the liberative work of Christ on earth. The church has liberative role to carry out if the message of the gospel is going to be meaningful to the poor, the down-trodden who are at the verge of despair. This is the juncture at which the import of Henry Venn's work is central to the present-day church. Perhaps a brief examination of the conditions of the poor and the impoverished state of Africa and Nigeria in particular will suffice.

The Miasma of Poverty

Poverty has been and continued to be a stigma in the African continent. It is like a thorn in the flesh, whose pain and irritation has started to spread. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines poverty as the state of being extremely poor. But Igbuzor tried to capture the state and condition of poverty in its entirety. He argues that poverty in Africa is multifaceted which encompasses the following: income, politics, ideology and society. He explains further, that, income poverty is a condition where people lack access to basic needs whereas political poverty projects a situation when people are denied basic rights in governance and participation in decisions concerning the generation, distribution and utilization of resources. In social poverty, the society is stratified into discrimination, stigmatization and dehumanization of individuals. While ideological poverty is a condition where people are bereft or forced to abandon indigenous, genuine,

people centred and practical ideas to organise society and distribute resources. Igbuzor notes that, the aforesaid are various brands of poverty which are interconnected and reinforce each other.

Arising from this scenario, it is obvious that the debilitating condition of Africa is like the analogy of a deformed child from birth; his ability to survive is limited or hampered greatly from childhood and he has to demonstrate exceptional ingenuity to keep him going in the midst of other children that are not disadvantaged. For instance, the capacity of Nigeria in particular and Africa to feed its people and stand tall in the circle of human modern progress, is pitiable. Africa still remains the poorest continent with over 38 of the world's least developed countries (LCDs). It has only 1% of the world's investment, 80% of which is the extractive in only about 5 countries. The continent has only about one percent of the world's share of trade and unfortunately some 340 million of its population live on less than \$1 per day. Even Nigeria, during the days of its petro-dollar has nearly 70% of its population within the crushing and destructive poverty line. This summation points to the fact that Africa is at a crossroad. It is of great concern that the situation of Africa has degenerated to such an extent that a good number of youths from many African countries including Nigeria, who are pushed to the precipice, have resorted to heart stopping risks, by illegally crossing over to other continents with healthy economic systems in search of greener pastures. Sadly, some of them die in the process of this adventure. The majority of those who make it alive engage in the most pathetic jobs there which ordinarily they would not do in their countries.

Indeed, Nigeria presents a paradox when it comes to poverty situation. The country is rich but the people are poor. Poverty in Nigeria encompasses a very complex society: regional climatic and ethnic differences are reinforced by different historical and socio-economic legacies. Poverty, either as a plague or cause of other specific under development ailments, afflicts Nigeria as it does other Nations of the World. Nigeria is ranked among the world's 25 poorest Nations of the world and retains its 152nd Human Development Index, yet, Nigeria has not been known to lack in such programmes of poverty reduction strategies. In spite of the expressed concerns of past governments and the plethora of programmes and policies that have a bearing on poverty, the incidence and scourge of poverty have worsened over the years.

The prospects of achieving the sustainable development goals of 'no more poverty' therefore, hinges on the compelling need for a pursuit of

economic independent for all. To this end, the sustainable poverty eradication agenda that can be used by the church and various stakeholders in ridding the world and Nigeria in particular of poverty is to pilot a sustained self-reliant and entrepreneurial programme.

There is indeed, a growing concern over the pervasive state of poverty in Africa and there must be concerted efforts to stem down the tide. According to Egwu, a correct and well-designed system provides the best guarantee for attaining a human resource development level capable of sustaining development at the individual, community and national level. He says that, a sustainable and genuine efforts aimed at poverty reduction or eradication must inter alia address human resources development and training in a manner that is linked to improvement in the quality of life. This assertion points to the import of this paper. In other words, in engendering sustainable development growth agenda, there is the need to empower people. As empowerment is the easiest and fastest way out of poverty. This parameter can be developed upon by embarking on entrepreneurial programmes. And viewing it from the Christian and theological perspective, Henry Venn's concept of entrepreneurial training is explored to further drive home this position. A discussion on what entrepreneurship is all about is what the next section shall focus on.

Theoretical Framework for Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development

Entrepreneurship is an economic enterprise, and economics as a social science deals with human behaviour. As a concept, it rests on the state of mind of the investor and a lot of variables usually come into play. The variables, according to Okechukwu, are; the environment, personality attributes, capital and labour. From this parameter, it is obvious, that entrepreneurship deals with the wealth and welfare of people, the government and the country at large. Abe also observes that, aspects of entrepreneurship within the national economy may concentrate on food, shelter, clothing, health, entertainment, transport and education. Entrepreneurial activities may specialize in one or more areas of these economic interests. While it is the government that usually provides public services, individuals or groups of people may participate in production of certain goods. Entrepreneurship can therefore be presented as a process that is dynamic in the creation and innovation of new values through time inference that centres on financial, psychological and sociological environment.

Therefore, stemming from Robert Hisrich's (1985) definition, someone that engages in entrepreneurial activities, viz-a-viz an entrepreneur is a person that involves in a process of creating something different with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming financial, psychological and social risk, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction. Although, there is no universal accepted definition of entrepreneur, nevertheless, from the foregone, an entrepreneur identify an opportunity, mobilize money and management skill and take calculated risk to open market for new product, processes and services.

Sustainable development entered the development discourse in the early 1970s. The 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment may be argued to be the first international conference that brought the concept of sustainability to the international arena. However, there is a general consensus in the literature that it was the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) that was largely responsible for providing the normative- conceptual bridge between environmental concerns and development outcomes. Sustainable development was further legitimized following the United Nation's Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 (known as the Earth Summit); the United Nations' Conference on Sustainable Development held in 1993; and the World Summit for Sustainable Development which was held in Johannesburg in 2002. These conferences facilitated the globalization of the concept and the establishment of an international consensus on the concept of sustainable development by the formulation of such action plans and guidelines; such as the Brundtland Report and Agenda.

However, since the introduction of this concept in development discourse, a variety of definitions have been conferred on the concept of sustainable development. Nonetheless, the most popularly employed definition, provided by the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), states that, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Another often-quoted definition of sustainable development is the one provided by Caring for the Earth. According to him as cited by Munro, (1995, p.29), sustainable development is, "improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying Capacity of supporting ecosystems". Nevertheless, considering the multiplicity of definitions and interpretations, there is a general view that identifies ecological and environmental factors as the limiting factor on

development. At the core of these views is the notion of an “inter-temporal conflict of interest” between the development practices of present generations and the perceived needs and capabilities of future generations. Critical to this agenda is the requirement of compromise between ‘needs’ and ‘wants’, hence the idea of limitations placed on the development process in order to sustain or improve the balance between homo-centric and nature-centred development.

Over the years, sustainable development has mainly focused on environmentalism framework as a result of climatic change and ecological degradation. However, as the world synthesized in globalization, the use of the term became interconnected to social and economic dimensions of development. This explains the reason why contemporary mainstream notions of sustainable development has been portraying it as a tri-dimensional concept featuring the interface between environment, economic, and social sustainability. As a result, as the concept of sustainable development gains more grounds, it has recently opened up the debate for diverse reflection. This underscores the consideration of ridding the world of poverty towards building sustainable development for sustainable livelihood. At this juncture, the essence of this paper is pinpointed. It should be noted however, that the idea of entrepreneurship is not a new concept. What the next section presents to us centres on the fact that, as far back as the 1866 the issue of engaging the people to be self-reliant came to the fore. Then, it was an innovation by Henry Venn, which, as spelt out today, are purely entrepreneurship enterprise. It is believed that if this has been followed to the letter, the extent of poverty woes that has befallen the continent of Africa would have been minimal.

Henry Venn’s Innovative Concept of the Church in Entrepreneurship

This section examines the importance of the active participation of the Christian church in entrepreneurship which was an age-long innovation that emanates from Venn’s policy for church development. In doing this, we shall extrapolate the principle of Thomas Fowell Buxton’s promotion of respectable livelihood and subsequently, Henry Venn’s positive development of Buxton’s “the Bible and the Plow.”

In the course of campaigning against slave trading in Africa, Thomas Fowell Buxton and his associates envisioned the possibilities of legal commerce that would provide the African peasant with a respectable livelihood and restore his dignity. As a result, Buxton and his associates like, William Wilberforce, Clarkson

formed themselves into a “Committee for assisting the black poor” attempted to bring to realization their plans to open Africa to the principle of the Bible and the plow. The publication of Thomas Buxton, titled “The African Slave Trade and its Remedy”, published in 1849 contained the idea commonly referred to as the Bible and the Plow.

The largest effort put forth in the 1840s was the Niger expedition promoted by Buxton. Although the first voyage was not successful, subsequent voyages opened the Niger area to philanthropic efforts and inspired subsequent endeavours in other parts of the continent in later years, such as the African Lakes company in the Lake Nyasa region and east Africa Scottish Industrial Mission in Kenya.

An enterprise combining commercial and philanthropic objectives for the introduction of European civilization on the Niger was undertaken in 1841. The emphasis that Buxton’s book placed on the use of Africans as trading and missionary agent laid a good foundation for the take-off of the native pastorate of Henry Venn. It was Henry Venn that thoroughly expanded the scope of “the Bible and the Plow”.

According to Abe, Henry Venn (1796-1873) was one of the British Missionary Church founders of note. To his credit, Venn’s vision was far ahead of that of his contemporaries. In 1866, he wrote “Instruction to Missionaries” on their principles for national character of Nigerian Churches. The church, he advised should be trained for self-propagating and self-dependence, i.e., she should be viable economically to cater for her financial obligations and that of her members, especially the less privileged. She should be organised to be able to generate enough funds with which to exist and function effectively without necessarily jeopardizing her spiritual obligations.

The three “selves” should be operational within the primary objective of the church to bring salvation to souls in the faith of Jesus Christ. According to Venn, the breath of life in a native Church depended on these “Selves”. The Church labours should practically be all embracing. For over-dependence upon “God loves a cheerful giver”, that is, mere generous giving or excessive taxation and assessment, without making efforts for self-support, may eventually incapacitate the church for both her spiritual and material responsibilities, especially to the ‘haves not’.

It should however be noted, that this innovation does not in any way hamper evangelistic work. Some argued that, the church is essentially set up to cater for the spiritual welfare and nurturing of the souls of

believers. While this is true, Venn's policy still gave priority to evangelism and Church planting but was also conscious of the people's poverty and encouraged agriculture and commerce, especially of coffee, cocoa and Palm oil. It is apparent from the aforesaid, that in addition to the missionary interest and propagation of the gospel, a concern for the well-being of the people of Africa was prevalent in Venn's thought. Therefore, Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, advocated lawful trade to replace slave trade. He maintained that profitable, legitimate commerce would cause chiefs to desist from the slave trade. He requested that missionaries send samples of products of the country to him. He presented these samples to brokers to stimulate trade with the countries. Missionary societies and governments introduced new crops, such as coffee, cocoa, cotton, and citrus fruits.

Therefore, in eradicating poverty, Henry Venn encouraged trade with the people. Commerce increased rapidly and became profitable after Lagos was taken and their country had benefited from economic advantages. By the end of the century, an important cotton industry was developing. This was, as Ayandele attests to, Henry Venn's 'euthanasia' of missions, his 'self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending' Church programme policy. By and large, instead of the church to develop on Venn's efforts towards this line, education and building of schools, which are not bad in themselves, was prioritized. Hence, as Nigeria witnessed growth in educational turn-out, the few governments' white-collar jobs was no longer sufficient to cater for the increasing population. As a result, unemployment set in. Urban migration consequently led to reduced number of people manning the production of food in the rural areas; and this led to the gradual increase of the poverty situation in Nigeria. I shall subsequently sum-up with the implication of Henry Venn's innovation in entrepreneurship for sustainable development.

Implication for Sustainable Development

In articulating innovative ideas as something that can engender entrepreneurship, it must not be misunderstood to exploitation and capitalism. The principles that hinge on innovation cum entrepreneurship is "to strengthen the leadership of social (and religious) sector and engendering the eroding of class distinctions. Hence, as Mellor (2003) puts it, innovation is essential to development and human progress. Innovation builds on education and intellectual freedom.

To this end, Venn's innovation in entrepreneurship development as far back as then, would still be

relevant in our day in ridding the world of poverty. Venn's innovation could be used as a method of restructuring to actualize value chain so as to reap an entrepreneurial profit and this will be of benefit to the poor if they are mobilized into it.

The implication therefore, draws on the fact that entrepreneurship as a socio-economic innovation, enhances development through the entrepreneur who is often seen as an active 'change agent'. The entrepreneur consciously uses innovation and creativity as tools to achieve enterprise. The Church should therefore pay attention to this particular angle. It should be noted that, in any growing economy like Nigeria, a great many changes take place simultaneously which calls for continuous adaptation of the structures of the economy in order to maintain balance between the different elements in it. As a result, a transformational process is birthed that will engender new techniques to facilitate development.

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